



## WORKPLACE SAFETY AND HEALTH IN LOUISIANA

*From The  
National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health*



### State Profile 2002

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*Delivering on the Nation's promise:  
Safety and health at work for all people through prevention.*

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### The National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health

NIOSH is the primary federal agency responsible for conducting research and making recommendations for the prevention of work-related illness and injury. NIOSH is located in the Department of Health and Human Services in the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. The NIOSH mission is to provide national and world leadership to prevent work-related illness, injury, disability, and death by gathering information, conducting scientific research, and translating the knowledge gained into products and services. As part of its mission, NIOSH supports programs in every state to improve the health and safety of workers. NIOSH has developed this document to highlight recent NIOSH programs important to workers and employers in Louisiana.

### The Burden of Occupational Illness and Injury in Louisiana

- In Louisiana there are approximately 1.9 million individuals employed in the workforce.<sup>1</sup>
- In 2000, 143 workers died as a result of workplace injuries.<sup>2</sup>
- The transportation and public utilities industry had the highest number of fatalities, followed second by construction, and third by manufacturing.<sup>2</sup>
- In 1999, the most recent year for which data are available, the rate of fatal workplace injuries was 7.2 deaths per 100,000 workers—above the national average rate of 4.5 deaths per 100,000 workers.<sup>2</sup>
- In 2000, there were 59,800 nonfatal workplace injuries and illnesses in Louisiana.<sup>3</sup>

### The Cost of Occupational Injury and Illness in Louisiana

In 2000, the most recent year for which data are available, a total of \$455.1 million was paid for workers' compensation claims by Louisiana private insurers, self-insured employers, and state funds.<sup>4</sup> This figure does not include compensation paid to workers employed by the federal government and also underestimates the total financial burden for private sector businesses, since only a fraction of health care costs and earnings lost through work injuries and illnesses is covered by workers' compensation. Chronic occupational illnesses like cancer are substantially under-reported in workers' compensation systems because work-relatedness is often difficult to establish.

# **How NIOSH Prevents Worker Injuries and Diseases in Louisiana**

## **Health Hazard Evaluations (HHEs) and Technical Assistance**

NIOSH evaluates workplace hazards and recommends solutions when requested by employers, workers, or state or federal agencies. Since 1993, NIOSH has responded to 15 requests for HHEs in Louisiana in a variety of industrial settings, including the following examples:

### ***Markville, Louisiana: Mold Exposure at a Hotel***

In 2001, NIOSH responded to a request by the Indian Health Service (IHS) on behalf of the Tribal Chairman of the Tunica-Biloxi Tribe for an HHE at a casino and resort hotel in Marksville, Louisiana. The request indicated that excessive humidity levels and inadequate ventilation had resulted in considerable mold growth on the walls of the hotel's north tower. Although no health problems had been reported, IHS was concerned that exposure to this mold could present a health risk to construction workers in this area. NIOSH provided IHS information on mold remediation and a list of environmental consultants in Louisiana. In addition, NIOSH investigators provided specific recommendations for controlling interior moisture which is key to preventing indoor mold contamination.

### ***Avondale, Louisiana: Exposure to Fumes and Solvents at Shipyards***

In 1997, NIOSH responded to a union request for an HHE at a shipyard facility in Avondale, Louisiana, to evaluate potential exposure of employees to dust from sandblasting, welding fumes, contaminants from burning paint, and various solvents associated with fiberglass work. Reported health effects included breathing problems and nose bleeds. NIOSH investigators found that while welders at the facility wore respiratory protective equipment that should sufficiently protect them, measured exposure during welding in a confined area indicated that a higher level of respiratory protection was warranted until engineering or work practice controls were implemented. Specific recommendations to help control exposure to welding fumes in the facility were provided by NIOSH investigators.

## **Fire Fighter Fatality Investigation and Prevention Program**

The purpose of the NIOSH Fire Fighter Fatality Investigation and Prevention Program is to determine factors that cause or contribute to fire fighter deaths suffered in the line of duty. NIOSH uses data from these investigations to generate fatality investigation reports and a database of case results that guides the development of prevention and intervention activities. The following fire fighter fatality investigation took place in Louisiana:

### ***Louisiana: Fire Fighter Collapses Due to Cardiac Arrest***

On November 18, 1997, a 27-year-old male fire fighter collapsed while fighting a fire in an apartment building. The victim, wearing full turnout gear and a self-contained breathing apparatus, was assisting a crew on the second floor landing in front of the apartment when, approximately half-way down the 15-step stairway, he collapsed. Nearby fire fighters immediately initiated cardio-pulmonary resuscitation, followed by advanced cardiac life support from the responding ambulance service. Despite these efforts, the victim died. NIOSH provided recommendations that rely on a three-pronged strategy for reducing the risk of on-duty heart attacks and cardiac arrests among fire fighters that aims to: minimize physical stress on fire fighters; identify and subsequently rehabilitate high risk individuals; and encourage wellness/fitness programs for fire fighters to help reduce risk factors for cardiovascular disease and improve cardiovascular capacity.

## Extramural Programs Funded by NIOSH

The following is an example of recent research grants funded by NIOSH in the state of Louisiana:

### ***Low Back Pain During Prolonged Work Activities***

With support from NIOSH, researchers at Louisiana State University are studying the role of spinal ligaments in causing spinal instability, injury, and low back pain in cyclic and prolonged occupational activities. The three-year-long experimental research program will provide an insight to the cause of lost muscle strength and coordination and work conditions that may prevent them.

*Additional information regarding NIOSH services and activities can be accessed through the NIOSH home page at <http://www.cdc.gov/niosh/homepage.html> or by calling the NIOSH 800-number at 1-800-356-NIOSH (1-800-356-4674).*

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<sup>1</sup>U.S. Department of Labor (DOL), Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), Local Area Unemployment Statistics, Current Population Survey, 2000.

<sup>2</sup>DOL, BLS in cooperation with state and federal agencies, Census of Fatal Occupational Injuries, 1999-2000.

<sup>3</sup>DOL, BLS in cooperation with participating state agencies, Survey of Occupational Injuries and Illnesses, 2000.

<sup>4</sup>National Academy of Social Insurance, *Workers' Compensation: Benefits, Coverage, and Costs, 2000 New Estimates*, May 2002.

